DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 930 CE 070 464

AUTHOR Liaroutzos, Olivier; Meriot, Sylvie-Anne
TITLE France's Administrative Tertiary: Stable Numbers for Occupations in Flux.
INSTITUTION Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications, Marseilles (France).
REPORT NO ISSN-1156-2366
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Training & Employment; n22 Win 1995

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accounting; Educational Needs; Educational Trends; *Education Work Relationship; *Employment Patterns; Employment Practices; *Employment Qualifications; Entry Workers; Foreign Countries; Labor Market; Postsecondary Education; Secretaries; Vocational Education; *White Collar Occupations
IDENTIFIERS *Administrative Services; *France

ABSTRACT

During the past decade, the number of jobs in France's administrative service sector has remained stable. General administrative work has become more infrequent; however, the basic occupations of secretary and accountancy have been maintained. Although the number of typists has declined, the number of "secretarial" jobs has increased dramatically. The basic competencies required of secretaries have remained largely unchanged; however, companies are increasingly looking for candidates with good interpersonal skills and sufficient technical know-how to assume greater backup responsibilities for professionals. Accounting assistants are also being expected to have both good managerial and good communication skills. The distribution of students graduating from France's secretarial and accounting training programs in 1993-1994 was as follows: vocational baccalaureat in accounting, 8%; technical baccalaureat in accounting, 19%; higher technician certificate (HTC) in accounting, 8%; vocational studies certification (VSC) in secretarial skills, 18%; HTC in secretarial skills, 7%; technical baccalaureat in secretarial skills, 9%; vocational baccalaureat in secretarial skills, 7%; VSC in accounting, 24%. The most recent data on labor market entry indicates that entry into administrative service jobs has proved easier for graduates with vocational baccalaureats in the office automation stream than for those with vocational studies certificates. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 389 930

Training & Employment

A FRENCH NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A Bouder

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

France's Administrative Tertiary: Stable Numbers for Occupations in Flux

Jobs in the administrative service sector have resisted the crisis. If the number of typists has declined, "secretarial" jobs have shown a spectacular increase. While basic competences remain unchanged, companies are looking for candidates who are at ease with inter-personal relations. The increased technical know-how of secretaries, for example, has been accompanied by more involvement in the company, where they assume greater back-up responsibilities alongside the professionals. Accounting assistants likewise have to combine rigourous management with good communication. Entry into these administrative service jobs is easier for graduates with vocational baccalauréats in the office automation stream than for those with vocational studies certificates (BEPs).*

Stable Numbers over the Past Ten Years

On the labour market, jobs related to the administrative service sector have demonstrated their durability. For more than ten years, including the 1991-1993 period when the national economic situation showed a particularly sharp decline, job numbers have resisted both the restructurings occasioned by the ongoing crisis and a steady stream of technical advances. In concrete terms, the number of "clerical employee" jobs remained stable, and there was an increase in "intermediate occupations" (supervisory positions) which include administrative tertiary jobs.[1] However, this "resistance capacity" varies from one occupation to another: there is a decline in the number of typists and a spectacular rise in that of "secretaries" and especially "executive secretaries". These changes are not without consequences for employers' requirements.

Finding a Job in the Sector

Interviewing employers about the way that such administrative service jobs are provided does not allow us to speak about a recruitment "policy" corresponding to a company typology (status, size, activity sector) or the kind of positions to be filled. At best, reference is made to selection "practices", even when more or less formalised procedures and criteria exist. In all cases, basic technical know-how is unavoidably one of the first requirements (mastery of the computer, spelling, reliable handling of numerical data), and tests, written or otherwise, are considered normal. Once this hurdle is passed, all the companies try to identify candidates who will be the most comfortable with inter-personal relations. This has led to the spread of more subjective evaluations from entry level on: interviews or even a jury (which is increasingly common, including for civil service examinations). The results of these tests are decisive: the diploma as a guarantee of qualification level is taken into consideration, but it is not a unique, exhaustive criterion.

✓ *The data presented here are the product of a Céreq survey commissioned by the Ministry of Education on the ways that companies utilise administrative tertiary diplomas from the vocational stream. These include vocational studies certificates (BEPs) in secretarial work and accounting and the vocational baccalauréat in the same areas of office automation. A decade after the creation of these diplomas, this study, undertaken in anticipation of their reform, reviews changes in the jobs for which they prepare.*

* See *Training and Employment* n°15 for explanations of the various diplomas and their abbreviations.

1. Sources: 1982 and 1990 censuses and 1990-1994 "employment" surveys.

CE 070 461

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

These changing modes of selection attest to the reduction, if not the elimination, of a split between administrative jobs traditionally recognised as involving inter-personal relations--secretaries, for example--and so-called closed administrative jobs, such as office workers. In fact, the analysis of the content of these jobs places communication at the heart of the work process, even in departments that provide exclusively internal services, as is often the case in the accounting field. In this respect, it would seem appropriate to abandon the terminology "office tertiary", which stigmatises a situation of immobility and compartmentalisation, in favour of "administrative tertiary", and at the same time, to redefine the main jobs typical of the sector.

Redefinition of Jobs The Spread of Micro-Computing

Whatever their size and activity sector, companies today are massively equipped with micro-computers, and where administrative jobs are concerned, mastery of the tool is not limited to a particular level or specialisation. In terms of the organisation of work, the spread of micro-computing and its improved performance is reflected in both a reduction and a greater distribution of keyboarding. Indeed, this activity, which should continue to decline in the coming years (with the development of networks and optical character reading greatly economising on operations), has already been spread throughout all the administrative tertiary jobs and even beyond them. Technicians, managers and sales personnel increasingly integrate the use of computer tools (particularly for certain keyboarding or typing tasks) into the competences related to their basic occupation.

These observations about changes in the occupations go hand in hand with a modification of occupational know-how. This can be explained by a higher level of quality and deadline requirements, the development of service activities and growing numbers of "inter-personal communications functions" [Chenu 1990].

General Administrative Work More Infrequent

The job area in which the individual situations are grouped together under the heading of "administrative workers" corresponds to basic administrative work where secretarial and accounting specialisations are neither expressed nor inherently distinct. On the contrary, it represents the common base of competences to be mastered in all forms of administrative intervention: reliability in the centralisation and recording of data and quality of expression for providing or summarising information. In the tertiary, this standard job type of "administrative worker" faces the greatest threat. Between the last two national censuses, for example, the number of "keyboarding operators", "various company administrative workers" or "typists" showed a sharp decline.

Two Specialisations Confirmed: Secretarial and Accounting

The in-company survey confirms that the two basic occupations of secretary and accountancy have been maintained. The continuity of this job structure does not mean, however, that the competences have not changed. The higher level of technical know-how among *secretaries* is accompanied by greater involve-

Basic Occupations in the Administrative Service Sector (Public and Private)
Descriptions of Three Standard Job Types*

• Administrative Employees

Their job is defined by an administrative intervention related to the preparation or updating of files. In both cases, the work involves centralisation, keyboarding and monitoring of data which may be essentially numerical--as is most often the case--essentially textual, or mixed. These activities recall the job situations of those who were formerly called "office workers". Today the same employees are expected to demonstrate greater openness towards the outside and a closer relationship to the product or service provided by their company. Indeed, in situating their intervention at a given level of the procedural chain, those who hold a particular job must be able to provide explanations to increasingly varied interlocutors. This trend implies requirements for oral and written communication that are becoming typical of the qualification level needed to fill this job.

• Secretaries

Their job attests to the stability and solidity of secretarial competences in work environments that are nonetheless undergoing continuous changes. More than ever, the work is structured around the organisation of time and activities, with permanent adaptation to unexpected circumstances. The common thread is the transversal activity of maintaining contacts among the most varied interlocutors, which requires the development of a veritable communications logistics. In fact, their intervention involves a large variety of tasks and represents a minimum level below which it is not possible to speak of secretarial employees (those who are principally involved with reception, switchboard or typing activities are not included in this standard job type).

• Accounting Assistants

Their jobs cover the entire range of ordinary accounting operations: records, verifications and intermediate calculations, closing of accounts, declarations and so forth. When they work for independent auditors or management consultants, they carry out all of these operations for clients. When they work in companies, their intervention can involve general accounting activities (recording various operations, banking) or applied activites (payment of wages), and sometimes management operations as well (estimate requests, late payments, monitoring the budget). In any case, they provide information on the state of company finances and legal arrangements. They may be called on to propose management indicators. These activities, along with that of information gathering, imply dialogue with a varied public. In terms of both guidance advice and training, it should thus be acknowledged that accounting increasingly functions as a service, both internally and externally.

* See "In Focus"

Diagram 1: Basic Occupations in the Administrative Service Sector and Possible Individual Career Paths

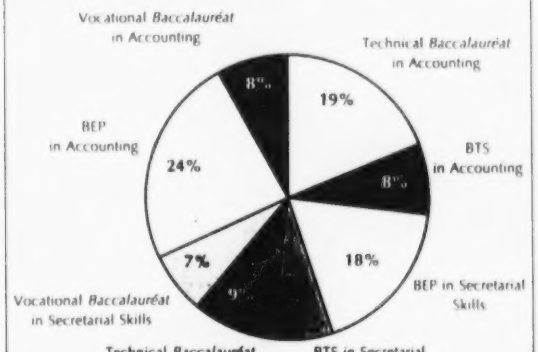
ment in activities particular to the company, which manifests itself in closer relations with the professionals they assist. *Accounting assistants*, meanwhile, have to be more open to their environment and combine the rigour of their field with a flexible behaviour that allows them to gather information in less standardised situations and provide frequent explanations of what they are doing. There is also an increasingly important body of competences common to the two specialisations: inter-personal approaches, preparatory accounting work, handling of files or contracts (see Diagram 1). *Secretaries* are now twice as numerous as *accounting assistants* (724,000 "accounting and financial services workers" compared with 320,000 in 1990; see Diagram 2), owing to a much greater increase among the former at a time when the latter were stabilizing. Finally, while it is well known that the occupation of *secretary* remains exclusively female, that of *accounting assistants* is moving in that direction, with fewer and fewer numbers of men (16 % in 1990).

The Educational System's Response, Academic Orientation: Preferences for Accounting Rather than Secretarial Activities

Training programmes in accounting attract greater numbers of students: 60 percent choose accounting compared to 40 percent for secretarial work (see Diagram 3). This is true for both the vocational stream (BEP and vocational *baccalauréat*) and all the technical streams (technical *baccalauréats* and higher technician certificates, BTS).

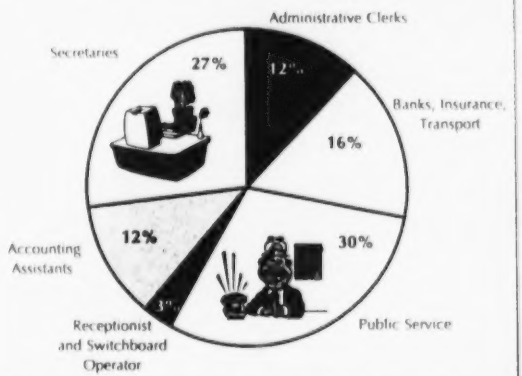
This gap relative to the job market, where, as we have seen, the ratio between specialisations is the reverse, attests to the educational system's difficulties in regulating the flow of students preparing for a given occupation in function of future job possibilities. The problem results from the comparative prestige of the two specialisations, in that the more favourable image of accounting influences the desired orientation of students and their families. The anxieties caused by computerisation, leading to a belief in the imminent decline of the secretarial profession, may have reinforced the impact of these social images. However, one concrete circumstance also justifies this form of orientation: vocational *baccalauréat* holders in accounting also find work in secretarial jobs. On the other hand, their counterparts with secretarial diplomas are less likely to find jobs in accounting (14 % versus nearly 5 %). In addition, it should be noted that the training system in accounting, which is sharply graded and offers diplomas beyond the *bac* + 2 (two years of study after the *baccalauréat*, which can be obtained through continuing training), also represents a positive factor in a specialisation where the proportion of men increases with the classification levels.

Diagram 2: Distribution of Students in Secretarial and Accounting Training Programmes (Numbers of Graduating Students, 1993/94 Academic Year)



Source: DEP data analysed by Céreq, Clapet file

Diagram 3: Proportion of Occupations Analysed in Administrative Service Jobs: Secretarial and Accounting Specialisations



Note: Occupational groupings have been established on the basis of INSEE's nomenclature for Occupations and Socio-Occupational Categories. The precise nature of administrative service jobs classified as "clerical" in banks and insurance or transport, as well as in the public service, could not be identified from this source alone.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Vocational Studies Certificate: Priorities for Basic Knowledge

If the occupation of *administrative worker* corresponds to a first-level administrative job, it is logical that BEP-holders should have direct access to such positions, with specialisation towards secretarial or accounting jobs following through professional advances, as Diagram 1 shows. However, the constraints of the labour market favour young people who have gone through specialised training programmes of a higher level, even to gain access to an entry-level job such as *administrative worker*. In practice, the BEP is increasingly becoming a form of preparatory training for ongoing studies in a vocational *baccalauréat* programme.

The Secrets of the Vocational *Baccalauréat*: Computer and Alternating Training

The vocational *baccalauréat* in office automation (called *Bureautique*), whose first graduates arrived on the labour market in 1987, is beginning to be clearly recognised by the companies. Two advantages account for this relative renown, which allows it to be distinguished from the technical *baccalauréat*. First of all, this training programme is characterised by very effective instruction in the use of computers. The companies are especially appreciative of this competence, which is not limited to the mastery of specific software but also involves a general curiosity about this field, thus area placing these beginners in a good position for helping their co-workers, making better use of the software or even providing information to a company client. The in-company training courses, generally lasting sixteen weeks over a two-year period, constitute the second element that undoubtedly plays a role in favour of the vocational *baccalauréat*. Employers interviewed have indeed explained that they were ready to consider these courses as a first work experience. These "trial runs" on the job constitute privileged opportunities for students who will learn how to "get along", notably on the level of inter-personal relations, and to find their place in a real environment within an organisation. These are determining competences in relation to the interface role that is growing in administrative work, including that of accounting. In this case, the principle of alternating training becomes a real strong point that young people can prominently feature in their résumés.

The Vocational *Baccalauréat* Finds Its Place on the Labour Market

The most recent data on labour-market entry indicates that distinctions are made according to levels of study. This is more apparent in terms of the kinds of work contracts than in terms of unemployment rates (about 45 % after eight months). Regardless of the specialisation of the diploma, only 20 percent of BEP-holders are employed with "ordinary" work contracts (unlimited- or limited-term contracts or temporary assignments) compared to 33 percent for vocational *baccalauréat* holders. Those holding a BEP are more numerous than *baccalauréat* holders in public job-entry programmes, but above all, they predominate in the most precarious and least paid subsidised jobs, such as Job Solidarity contracts (CES) in the public service (among secretaries, for example, the proportion is 6.8 % BEP-holders compared to 2.2 % with vocational *baccalauréats*). Conversely, work contracts in alternance, like skilling contracts, more often benefit to vocational *baccalauréat* holders.

The latter are also most able to obtain jobs relating to their original training. On the one hand, they mainly enter administrative tertiary jobs (in 1992, about 85 % of those finding work). On the other hand, training specialisations within these jobs are more recognised, allowing greater job entry for positions where the main function relates to secretarial work or accounting. To be sure, the progress made by the vocational *baccalauréat* must be qualified by the fact that the worsening of the economic crisis in recent years has increased the unemployment rate among young *baccalauréat* holders and has widened the gap with the Higher Technicians' Certificates (two years of study after the *baccalauréat*), which, in the administrative tertiary, still remain the royal path to employment.

Olivier Liaroutzos and Sylvie-Anne Mériot
Céreq

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chenu, Alain. *L'archipel des employés* [The Archipelago of the Employees]. Collection des Etudes. Paris: Insee, 1990.

Mandon, Nicole. *La gestion prévisionnelle des compétences : la méthode ETED* [Forward-Looking Management of Competences: the ETED method]. Céreq Etudes no. 57 (December 1990).

Verdier, Eric. *La bureautique [Office Automation]*. Paris: La Découverte, 1983.

FRENCH RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF OCCUPATIONS, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Céreq

The contents of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, provided that the source is acknowledged. Copyright 1995

Administration : Céreq, 10 place de la Joliette, 13474 Marseille cedex 02. Tel : (33) 91 13 28 28
Executive Publisher : Vincent Merle. Managing Editor : Michel Stoéz. Translator : Miriam Rosen.
ISSN 1156 2366 Dépôt légal 4e trimestre 1995

BEST COPY AVAILABLE